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ABSTRACT

This study investigated practices, attitudes, and behaviors that experienced teachers used to motivate middle school students. Participants were 10 teachers from one Virginia middle school. The teachers' classroom behaviors and teacher-student interactions were observed. Teachers completed interviews that asked about: their definition of motivation; characteristics of motivated and unmotivated students; general practices and behaviors that motivated students, including those used by the interviewee and those observed to be used specifically by other teachers; and observed connections between parent influences and student motivation. Results indicated that establishing a positive teacher-student relationship was a strong motivator. Teacher ability to meet diverse students' needs was a motivating factor. When teachers presented connections between students' lives beyond the classroom and the material presented in school, students were motivated. Extrinsic motivators were only advocated as a means of getting total classroom involvement. Motivation was lowered when parents assumed student academic responsibility and/or placed excessive stress on the student. Motivation was enhanced when parents created an accepting and supportive relationship with their children while placing value on their children's education. (Contains 28 references.) (SM)

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# THE PRACTICES, ATTITUDES, AND BEHAVIORS OF EXPERIENCED TEACHERS THAT MOTIVATE MIDDLE GRADES STUDENTS

by

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## Introduction

On December 10, 1998, the U.S. Bureau of the Census reported that in 1998, only 88.1 percent of American citizens (all races and sexes) who were between ages 25 to 29 had completed at least four years of high school. Moreover, 10,249 students in tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades (all races and sexes) dropped out of school in 1996 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998). One of the primary reasons that students drop out of school is a lack of motivation. The term dropout, however, "may not be adequate to convey the disastrous consequences of abandonment of school by children and adolescents; educational suicide may be a far more appropriate label" (Clifford, 1990, p. 22).

School abandonment is not limited to a small percentage of minority students, low ability children, or mentally lazy kids. "It is a systematic failure affecting the most gifted and knowledgeable as well as the disadvantaged, and it is threatening the social, economic, intellectual, industrial, cultural, moral, and psychological well-being of our country. Equally disturbing are the students who sever themselves from the flow of knowledge while they occupy desks, like mummies" (Clifford, 1990, p. 22).

Many experts in the field of education have identified a lack of student motivation as a major reason for low achievement scores and school dropout rates, but the consequence of decreased student motivation is not limited just to those items. Without a desire to learn, students who attend class will often not learn. As a result, students may even obtain a high school diploma and still lack the basic skills needed to survive in the workplace (Gonder, 1991, p. 4; Hootstein, 1994, p. 213).

A lack of motivation is particularly evident at the onset and passage through adolescence. All body systems and sub-systems are affected when puberty is reached.

Students who were previously driven with intense curiosity are now unwilling to participate in arising opportunities to explore. At this level, traditional classes seem boring and offer little or no connection to the students' lives outside of the classroom. Teaching students in this stage of development can be very challenging. Students who were pleasant and amiable often become more irritable, quarrelsome, and obnoxious during this period. The stress of physiological maturation causes these behaviors. Unfortunately, teachers who do not fully understand this natural process further degrade their students' feelings about education by offering undue resistance (Lumsden, 1994, p. 1; Sanders, 1995, p. 21).

During adolescence, peer pressure exerts a significant influence on the academic behavior of students and can decide the path they will choose toward academic achievement. Peer pressure can potentially place education in a positive light, but usually rejects academic success. In the event that peers become supportive of academics, gains in motivation can occur; however, this is often not the case (Gonder, 1991, pp. 4-5; Sanders, 1995, p. 13; Corno, 1992, p. 78).

One of our nation's foundational philosophies is that education for all is necessary in a democratic government. National survival hinges on the success or failure of our educational system. Raising student motivation in our public schools is an essential element in ensuring progress.

Expert teachers who have a proven record of success with motivating students are a valuable resource for beginning teachers. The insight and wisdom of these education veterans offer strategies and methods that can also benefit other educators. This inquiry seeks to draw on the experience and wisdom of these expert teachers.

## A Review of the Literature

Motivation is a term that is difficult to define. Drawing from a variety of sources, the term motivation, as related to education, can be captured best as a student's "desire to participate in the learning process" (Lumsden, 1994, p. 1). Moreover, a more specific definition classifies motivation as either extrinsic or intrinsic (Corno, 1992, p. 71; Sanders, 1995, p. 4).

A student who is extrinsically motivated "performs in order to obtain some reward or avoid some punishment external to the activity itself" (Lumsden, 1994, p. 1). Many researchers have recently agreed that extrinsic rewards are ineffective and only change behavior temporarily. These researchers argue that people revert to their previous behavior when the rewards are discontinued (Kohn, 1993, p. 784). In addition, people who are given extrinsic rewards for a behavior they are likely to do anyway will perform that previous behavior only for the reward. In essence, "the reward extinguishes the behavior" (Bracey, 1994, p. 494).

Supporters of extrinsic motivation argue that rewarding behavior intermittently strengthens behavior, even when rewards are no longer available. In order for this to occur, the frequency of reward needs to decrease and the interval between rewards need to increase. Additionally, they argue that extrinsic rewards may be necessary in order to supply students with basic skills necessary for tasks that are more complex (Chance, 1993, pp. 788-789).

An intrinsically motivated student "undertakes an activity for its own sake, for the enjoyment it provides, the learning it permits, or the feelings of accomplishment it evokes" (Lumsden, 1994, pp. 1). Research indicates that intrinsically motivated

"students tend to employ strategies that demand more effort and that enable them to process information more deeply" (Lumsden, 1994, pp. 2). These students use strategies of acquiring information and making decisions that are more logical than extrinsically oriented students do. Intrinsically motivated students seek out challenging tasks and exhibit more effort (Lumsden, 1994, pp. 1-2).

According to Wlodkowski (1990), teachers cannot directly motivate students because individuals are responsible for their own learning. Teachers can influence students, but they cannot cause students to become internally motivated. True self-affirmation occurs through responsibility, but not through obedience. Consequently, these statements relieve the blame often placed on teachers when students do not perform well (Sanders, 1995, p. 12).

William Glasser agrees that teachers cannot cause students to be internally motivated. Choice theory (formerly called control theory) states that individuals must satisfy at least one of five basic needs in order to be internally motivated. Glasser currently defines these five basic needs (which have redefined over the past several years) as survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun (The William Glasser Institute, 1999).

Other researchers disagree that students are only motivated internally and believe that teachers can and should motivate students. Sanders (1995) states that teachers are powerful role models, despite influence exerted by peers. Furthermore, it is important to realize that motivation is learned (Sanders, 1995, p. 11). This debate can be supported on either side by several factors that cause students to exhibit a higher or lower motivation.

Students who are held to low standards perform to low standards. Challenging students within reason will usually cause students to rise to the challenge (Gonder, 1991, p. 3). The level of work reflects the level of effort. Students who expend little effort experience small amounts of success. Students who successfully expend larger amounts of effort experience greater amounts of success. Greater amounts of success will yield a higher level of confidence, raising the students' self-esteem. A higher self-esteem results in a higher level of motivation (Sanders, 1995, p. 19).

Students who are tracked display lower motivation in school. Remedial classes move at a slower rate and practice lower order thinking skills. Eventually, these students become permanently trapped in an "intellectual prison" (Gonder, 1991, p. 4).

Giving students control over their learning has been demonstrated to increase motivation. Students need to be given a choice in what and how they learn. Furthermore, when students control their own learning experience, they develop an intrinsic desire to learn (Bartscher, Gould, & Nutter, 1995, p. 27).

Often, overextended teachers and schools lack focus on the individual. Schools become institutionalized and students feel like "just another number." When given large classes, teachers assign less work because of heavy class loads. In smaller class sizes, teachers can create personalized instruction and offer personal feedback on assignments. In smaller classes, students feel like they are in an environment where someone (the teacher) cares about them (Gonder, 1991, p. 11).

Lesson presentation plays an important role in motivating students. When teachers can relate curriculum to the lives of the students outside of the classroom, students display more interest. Students who see little connection between classroom

learning and their lives outside of school quickly become bored and unproductive (Sanders, 1995, p. 15). William Glasser states that "until students are able to see the practical benefits of their education, they will continue to lack a fundamental desire to cooperate with the school system" (Bartscher, Gould, & Nutter, 1995, p. 27).

When teachers present material enthusiastically, student interest is peaked (Gonder, 1991, p. 15). Additionally, when teachers are enthusiastic about their lesson content, students also exhibit enthusiasm toward the content. Conversely, if teachers exhibit a negative attitude toward their content, the students will feel that the content is not interesting and not worth learning (Sanders, 1995, p. 26).

Clear learning objectives must be stated at the outset of each lesson. This gives students an introduction to the content and students can understand the purpose of the lesson. Finally, students can develop a general sense of the desired learning outcomes (Gonder, 1991, p. 15).

Giving students an active voice in the classroom and encouraging students to respond and take risks elicits motivation. When students make an error, emphasizing that errors are valuable learning experiences will cause students to accept the risk in the future. When students give correct and/or well thought out information, providing some type of positive response (praise) become a reward that causes students to exhibit desired behaviors (Gonder, 1991, p. 16). Additionally, "praising and encouraging students is a way for the student to become better aware of your expectations and their own achievements" (Sanders, 1995, p. 27).

Parents offer a very influential force in motivating their children. In order to use parents as motivators, they must be involved in their child's education. Parents can be

invited into the classroom as either an observer or a volunteer. Any volunteerism should be meaningful and assigning menial tasks to parent volunteers should be avoided. Furthermore, teachers and schools need to communicate with parents frequently. When communicating with parents, parents should be informed about poor, as well as positive behavior. Finally, providing parents with advice on how they can help their children at home establishes positive communication between parent and teacher (Gonder, 1991, pp. 21-22).

A student's peer group can have an intense effect on the degree to which academic achievement is valued. Peer groups that value academics are supportive, but peer groups that disdain academic achievement condemn those who do achieve (Gonder, 1991, pp. 4-5).

Active learning such as cooperative learning can raise motivation. Students who show little motivation or interest become "conscientious when faced with peer pressure and the opportunity to succeed in their assigned group" (Miller, 1995, p. 57). Students are heterogeneously grouped according to either academic ability or social standing. It is important to note that cooperative learning is more than telling students to push their desks together for group work (Blosser, 1996, p. 1).

There are several different theories on what motivation is and how it can be improved. Some researchers believe that motivation stems from extrinsic sources and others argue that motivation occurs only when intrinsic in nature. Some researchers believe that peers and educators can motivate students while other researchers argue that students cannot be motivated by other people. It is clear that there are conflicting

opinions on motivation, but an examination of the strengths and weaknesses behind each argument provide for a neutral approach to the problem (Sanders, 1995, p. 30).

## Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to identify teacher practices, attitudes, and behaviors that experienced teachers use to motivate students in the middle school classroom.

**Research Value**

This study focuses on teachers in the middle school setting. Middle school is a very social environment and students are confronted with and influenced by peer pressure each day. In addition, middle school is often a time of confusion and emotional strain caused by rapid physical development during adolescence. These factors cause many students to come to school each day with no desire to do well. Other students have the desire, but lack the tools to succeed. Not only do these students often display poor academic performance, but they also make it difficult for teachers to reach students who are motivated (Corno, 1992, p. 78; Gonder, 1991, pp. 4-5; Sanders, 1995, p. 13).

Student motivation is a critical element for student success in middle school. By understanding how to motivate more students, we increase academic achievement and make teaching a more contributive activity by reducing the active resistance that many middle school students often seem to display towards formal education.

## Methodology

Research Site

The study was conducted at Thompson Middle School. This school is located on the outskirts of a small Virginia town with a population of approximately 30,000 people. This middle school is the only middle school in the town. The school itself has a faculty with a relatively high morale, despite accountability pressures to pass a new system of state standards of learning assessments.

This middle school has sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade classes. The sixth-grade has two teams that are divided into three sub-teams. Each sub-team has two teachers. The seventh- and eighth-grade each have two teams of four teachers. Approximately seventy percent of the teachers on teams (including special education resource teachers) are female and approximately thirty percent are male.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

This inquiry was performed at a middle school with which the researcher was employed. The interviewees were selected based upon multiple recommendations by other teachers and administrators within the school. Those recommendations were based upon historical success with motivating students. In addition, all study participants had been teaching a minimum of ten years: a base of experience from which to draw.

Participants

1. Abe is a male, eighth-grade, science teacher who has 33 years of teaching experience.
2. Troy is a male, seventh-grade, social studies teacher who has 28 years of teaching experience.

3. Maggie is a female, sixth-grade, language arts teacher who has 21 years of teaching experience.
4. Lisa is a female, eighth-grade, mathematics teacher who has 20 years of teaching experience.
5. Bart is a male, sixth-grade, language arts teacher who has 10 years of teaching experience.
6. Ralph is a male, eighth-grade, social studies teacher who has 10 years of teaching experience.
7. Ned is a male, sixth-grade, mathematics, science, and social studies teacher who has 23 years of teaching experience.
8. Maude is a female, sixth-grade, language arts and social studies teacher who has 18 years of teaching experience.
9. Marge is a female, sixth-grade, language arts and social studies teacher who has 15 years of teaching experience.
10. Homer is a male, sixth-grade, mathematics and science teacher who has 23 years of teaching experience.

Observations of Classroom and Student-Teacher Interactions

Classroom behaviors and student-teacher interactions were observed. Multiple teaching observations were conducted in the classrooms of each teacher. Furthermore, I (the researcher) have conducted previous research in the classroom of Ned and Maude. Student-teacher interactions were observed of all teachers as well.

Study Reliability

Interviewee selection was based on teacher history and behavior appropriate to the study topic: motivating students. In addition, each teacher had at least ten years of teaching experience. These interviewees had received outspoken referrals from other teachers and administrators in the school. Furthermore, the researcher performed multiple classroom observations before interviewee selection of each of the study participants.

All interviews were conducted in the participants' classroom or team office to provide a comfortable setting. Each interview lasted anywhere from twenty minutes to over an hour. In order to provide consistency for data collection, all interviews followed a questioning topic outline of the following topics in this particular order:

(1) define motivation,

(2) the characteristics of a motivated student,

(3) the characteristics of an unmotivated student,

(4) general practices and behaviors that motivate students,

(5) general practices and behaviors that motivate students used specifically by the interviewee,

(6) general practices and behaviors that motivate students observed to be used specifically by other teachers, and

(7) observed connections between parent and student motivation.

Data collection occurred during the interview session via a tape recorder. Using a word processor, subjects' responses were transcribed verbatim within two hours of each

interview. During analysis of the data, responses were replayed to examine vocal tones and inflections. This provided a more accurate representation of the speaker's intentions.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established with data triangulation. The most informative source of data was the set of teacher interviews from which common themes emerged. The other two sources of data were classroom observations and teacher/student interaction outside of class; both of these sources reinforced the comments made during teacher interviews.

## Results

Using the previously described method of data collection, teacher responses were grouped into five major categories: characteristics of motivated and unmotivated students, teacher behaviors that motivate students, extrinsic motivators, motivation is internal, and positive and negative parental influences on motivation.

### Characteristics of Motivated and Unmotivated Students

Before discussing motivational strategies, one must first be able to distinguish between students who are motivated and those who are not. Based on years of experience, the teachers interviewed offered several characteristics of students who are motivated to do well in school. Teachers also distinguished between students who are motivated intrinsically and students who are motivated extrinsically.

Intrinsically motivated students enjoy learning or the tasks associated with learning. Teachers offered similar descriptions of these students. Maude described these students as ones who "enjoy learning." Bart said that "they are interested in doing thing for the sake of doing them." Maggie described them as "the ones who always have their hands up ready to participate and [that] they just seem glad to be here (in school)." Ned stated that "they want to learn for the sake of learning." Marge said that motivated students "seem to love to learn. They like challenges. They like the excitement of new and different areas of learning…[They] are just driven to do well. The majority of the motivated ones just really have fun with what they are doing." Troy explained that motivated students "feel good to be able to do something and accomplish something, and [they enjoy] the feeling they get from it."

Some students are motivated because they seek the approval of others. Maude explained that these students "care about the judgement that they receive from other adults and parents and from teachers." Ned stated that "they want to please."

One of the most recognizable traits of motivated students is that they come to class prepared and seek to learn. Most of the interviewed teachers stated this directly. Maggie stated that motivated students "require little repetition of directions...[because] they are prepared for class." Bart stated that these students "come into class and they are ready to learn. It's prearranged in their mind." Ned said, "They come in ready to do things in my classroom. They ask me for extra work if they're having problems." Homer explained that,

> A motivated student is one who goes above and beyond the call of duty, one that is excited about learning, one who brings extra information to class, one that is always on top of tasks no matter how small or how large they might be.

Interview subjects also commented on and identified characteristics of unmotivated students. Most teachers commented that these students display an attitude of indifference. Homer explained that they "tend really not to care what you do, one way or the other." Maude said, "Unmotivated students, I think, generally have that 'I don't care' kind of attitude...[and]...don't appear to be concerned if they do well or don't do well." Bart said, "Unmotivated students come in sometimes and they just don't seem to have enthusiasm for much of anything."

Teachers identified inattentive behaviors in many unmotivated students. Abe said that they are "not interested in what is going on in the class." Bart stated that "they don't seem to want to pay attention." Homer explained that unmotivated students "tend to like to sleep in your class."

Marge described unmotivated students as "lethargic." She said, "They tend to be pretty unhappy [in the classroom]…. They tend to be very superficial learners. [Unmotivated students make statements like], 'tell me what I have to know.' They won't go in-depth; they're minimalists."

Ned stated that some unmotivated students are resistant to learning. He said, "[Unmotivated students] refuse to do assignments. [They are] usually withdrawn [and] don't get along with other kids very well…. [They] can cause problems with other students."

Ned also stated that some unmotivated students are "usually below grade level." He said, "Not always, but most cases of unmotivated kids I see are working below grade level."

Ned described unmotivated students as "lazy." He explained, "I guess lazy could fit into that category (characteristics of unmotivated students). I have some students that just seem to be lazy; they have the ability but don't want to do the work." Furthermore, the majority of teachers stated that unmotivated students are unprepared when they come into class. They do not have materials with them and/or their homework is incomplete.

Some students are not motivated in specific content areas. Lisa, a math teacher, described how mathematics has caused students to have a lower motivation:

> I do see some non-motivated students in mathematics, [because] they don't understand numbers. They haven't done well in math their whole life, so they don't feel good about math. They don't feel that they can do [math], so their whole self-esteem about math is 'I can't do math' before they come in. Sometimes I battle half the year [with] that whole math phobia thing…So it's easier to just say, 'I don't really like this,' than to say, 'I can't do this.'

Abe explained that students' inability to identify the value of academic material can lead to unmotivated behavior:

> [Unmotivated behavior stems from] not being able to connect with what we (students and teacher) do each day and how that translates into what [the student is] going to be doing fifteen years from now [or] ten years from now. They cannot see the value of what we (the class) are doing. You're working on an assignment and you'll have the question, 'Why are we doing this?' [and] 'What's this got to do with the real world?' They can't see the big picture.

Before attempting to categorize or diagnose a student's degree of motivation, one should be aware that motivation can be deceptive. Abe explained that motivation is not always measurable by a student's level of achievement. He explained that "[motivation] is different for every student. One kid may study an hour for a test and another kid studies five minutes for a test, and yet the one with five minutes can make a better grade."

The majority of teachers interviewed believed that most or all students want to be successful. Abe believed that "every student that comes through the door would like to be successful." Ned expressed the following belief:

> I think deep down inside, most students want to succeed; they just don't have the tools to do it or the motivation to do it…I would say most kids want to succeed, they really do. It's the teacher's job to get them to a point of how can they do that.

Troy explained that a lack of support does not necessarily equate to a lack of desire for success:

> Quite often, they (students) really do care, but they don't have someone or something to sort of prod them along and to create an interest or a desire to be successful in something. It could be something environmental, there may not be much encouragement at home, there may be just overpowering circumstances that make other things more important than success in school for instance.

Marge stated unmotivated behavior stems from insecurities:

> I think that the non-motivated really have a deep-seeded insecurity and feel…that they can't think the big thoughts and come up with the big ideas; and so they've just kind of been beaten down. They're kind of like 'whipped puppies.'

Motivation may also be due to things unassociated with home or school. One interviewed teacher, Homer, explained that lack of motivation may be due to the peer pressure and/or emotional strain of physical development during adolescence:

> There's certain things that you have to also elude to like peer pressure, emotional stability at that point and time because maybe they're changing as far as growth and development. They don't understand their bodies and they're really worried about everything else around them and not really what they're doing.

Teacher Behaviors that Motivate Students

Interviewees were asked how they and other teachers have successfully motivated students in the past. The majority of teachers emphasized the need for a positive relationship with the students. This point was especially reinforced during classroom observations and student-teacher interactions. Bart stated that he tries "to establish a good relationship with the student." Maude explained:

> I think teachers who obviously care about their students can be motivating...[teachers] who take an interest in their kids personally [and] who work to build a rapport, that can be motivating to students [because] they want to be in your class…. I just think rapport and attitude go a long way, too. Kids know that you're interested in them and they tend to be more motivated in your classroom.

Ralph also described the importance of establishing a relationship with students:

> I think the bottom line is establishing a relationship with each student…they get to know your expectations. You establish a baseline of trust and then from that point, then you can start doing lots of different things. If you have that relationship then you're

> working together towards their education…You know them, they know you, you have a basis of trust.

Ned described his particular relationship with his students:

> There's no way I'm going to try to motivate these kids if I don't care about them. I love these kids and they know it. I'm not embarrassed to tell them it and they know it. If they know I care then they tend to care more and they will. I feel really good about the relationship I have with these kids.

Abe explains that good teachers share a common trait of concern for their students:

> I think the quality that I see in all good teachers is a real caring for the students. When a student knows you care, and truly care about them as a person, I think that's one of the greatest motivating factors that you've got. Giving a kid a second chance if you have to [is important]. I just don't think you can be hard-lined.

Homer described a relationship with students that draws the distinction between "being a friend to the student" and "befriending the student":

> I think number one…I've seen some [teachers] that had such a rapport with student. Yes, they were the teacher, and yes, they were the student, but they somehow were able to cross the barrier and it's not really being a friend to the student, but it's befriending the student, and they have a great rapport with each other where they talk with each other, they joke with each other, they have humor, there's times of seriousness. Things that are motivating such as that…let them (the student) know that, yes, that the teacher is human also.

According to observations of student-teacher interactions, Homer was observed to have a close relationship with many of his students. He made students feel comfortable around him by using humor and valuing them as individuals. Furthermore, it also seemed that he was able to respond to each student in a manner that best matched the personality of that individual student.

Troy explained that it is important to establish a relationship with students, but being a teacher comes first. Furthermore, he felt that being a good teacher makes it possible to be a student's friend:

> I tell the students that, 'I would like to be you're best friend, but the only way to be your best friend is to be your best teacher first'…I still think that I can be a friend to the students by being the best teacher that I can be for them and I think that would apply to really any teacher. You have to be yourself first, because they'll spot a phony.

Valuing answers and problem strategies of students can elicit enhanced motivation. Marge explained that, "I really value their thinking and value all of their ways of tackling problems, then they can become motivated."

Not all students respond to the same motivating stimulus. Diversity among students was a point that the interviewed teachers also emphasized. Educators need to be prepared to cater to a wide variety of students who are motivated by different means. Troy said, "I think that in teaching middle (school) kids you need to provide a variety of ways of motivating." Maude explained:

> I think motivation is a hard, hard issue to deal with and you are up against a lot where kids are so diverse and they're coming from really different backgrounds, and what motivates one kid is not necessarily going to motivate another. You have to be open-minded and look at a lot of possible ways to make it work for you and your students.

Bart explained that different approaches may be necessary to motivate students:

> You try different things with different students. If developing a close relationship with them or letting them know that you do trust them and want them to do well isn't enough, sometimes I try getting upset with them a little bit if that works. Different kids seem to be motivated by different things. Some of them are motivated by getting a reward, some are motivated by having something taken away from them, but not many though.

Homer explained that classes and individuals react to different motivating strategies:

> I think every class that you deal with is different. They have their own "MO," so to speak, and what you did one year to one class might not work with the next class. I've noticed that quite a bit. Sometimes some kids like for you to joke with them and other kids do not. I think you have to evaluate what your class makeup is at the very beginning and find out what's the best thing for that class.

Marge stated that we need diverse teachers in addition to diverse methods of motivating students:

> We really need diverse teachers and teachers that go at motivation in very different ways, because we have such a diverse population. What works for me for a group of students, there is still some that it doesn't work for and they're going to need a very different approach. It would be kind of nice if we could match students with teachers.

The interviewees referred to student diversity mainly in terms of personality, however, the school system used in this study was observed to have a very culturally diverse student population. At the time of the study, there were approximately 30 different languages spoken by the students in this school system. This school system believes in partially or completely mainstreaming students into the regular classroom who are identified as ESL (English as a Second Language).

The behaviors that teachers exhibit in the classroom are powerful motivating factors. Teachers were observed to keep the students engaged and interested during lessons. Many teachers used real-life examples of the material that connected it to the lives of the students. Teachers were excited about their material and frequently presented it through multiple methods (e.g., hands-on activities, cooperative grouping activities, demonstrations, etc.).

Teachers described a variety of behaviors that resulted in motivating students. Maggie said that enthusiasm, humor, and a variety of activities that are appropriate for each student's level motivate students:

> You have to be glad to be teaching. If you're not enthusiastic, you're not going to motivate a students. I think a sense of humor always helps too. It's [also] helpful to vary the types of activities that you're requesting the students to do: listening activities versus written work versus hands-on activities, working as a group versus individual work or participating as a

> whole class in something…. [Finally], make sure you're providing work at their level.

Ned also emphasized the importance of presenting material appropriate to each student's level. Furthermore, he addressed enthusiasm and planning.

> I think the first thing you need to do, especially with sixth graders, is to meet them at their level. If you can put them where they are readability wise and where they're skilled mathematically, and they start seeing success, then they're self-motivated. If they are successful at something, that builds motivation. A kid that has made Cs and Ds in math, and all of the sudden he starts making As and Bs because he's where he should be, that motivation in itself and they like coming to math class. They don't mind doing the work. They see rewards. The rewards are the grades.
>
> If our lesson plans are good, and we're looking at our kids' needs with our lessons, the kids are going to be motivated. They're going to want to learn. And if we do that with enthusiasm and excitement, and use a lot of hands-on stuff, kids automatically are going to be motivated to succeed in your class…Every successful teacher that I've seen is one that is enthusiastic about what they do.

Marge plans lessons that engage the students:

> I think [teachers can motivate students by] planning exciting lesson where they're (students) involved almost 100% of the time; where they're not being 'spoon-fed;' and where you mix-up your format so there is some group time, because they're very social beings at middle school level; and where you present material relating it to the present; and showing them how it fits into their lives, that this is not something that's just out there that they'll never use again, that everything we do really does have meaning for their life.
>
> Abe uses modeling to motivate students. He also connects education to students' lives:
>
> I try to be a good role model for the students. In terms of the way I present myself, not just as a science teacher, but as a teacher of all disciplines. I try to relate as many real-life experiences as I can to the value of an education. I try to present a person who enjoys what they do. I really value the students that are in my class. [I try to] show all the students that you can be successful and you can be happy in the workplace.

Troy also advocated modeling as a successful tool for motivating students:

> I think the first way a teacher motivates students is by being excited and showing that the teacher himself or herself is motivated to do the job, that the teacher likes what he or she is doing, is interested in the students, and really just sets a good example for the students themselves. If the student can see that the teacher is motivated, the teacher enjoys what's going on, and the teacher is excited about it, it will certainly help to motivated the student and bring the student along with you. But if you're not excited about what you're doing, you're not going to motivate very many people.

As stated earlier, unmotivated students often choose not to complete their homework. Two strategies were observed to aid these problems. Students who did not complete homework were required to use a "homework notebook." Each day, students were required to write down homework assignments in a notebook with a planner and the teacher was required to initial to verify that it was recorded. Students were then periodically accountable for their homework notebooks. Teachers also used a system of punishment. Students wrote their names on the board for being unprepared (in addition to inappropriate behavior). Each incident was called a "step." If identified four times within a week, a "team referral" was issued to the corresponding student. Referrals adversely affected the students in various ways, depending on the team of teachers. This study did not seek to determine if these particular strategies increased or decreased student motivation.

Extrinsic Motivators

Many students are motivated because of extrinsic incentives. Troy explained that extrinsically motivated students "want to achieve something specific and that something specific can be something as simple as an A or a B or a C on a report card, or it can be to get a monetary reward from parents."

Many teachers contended that true motivation is intrinsic. Marge explained that "motivated students don't need the extrinsic motivation; they tend to be pretty internally motivated." Troy stated that:

> The truly motivated student, the intrinsically motivated student, doesn't care about the grade because they already know that they've done well and they don't need somebody to tell them that…It wouldn't make the slightest difference whether or not they got a grade. They give the same effort and they set their own standards, and the grade to them matters only in that it matters to somebody else.

When discussing extrinsic motivators, grades were not considered an extrinsic reward. The teachers interviewed referred to tangible items such as candy as extrinsic motivators. Only Ned and Lisa were observed to use candy as a motivator to elicit involvement during class. (They explain their rationale later in this section.) It was also observed that Bart, Ned, Maude, Marge, and Homer used candy as an award for recognition at the end of each six-week grading period.

Many of the teachers do not use extrinsic rewards (or limit their use) because the goal of all teachers interviewed was that students become internally motivated to learn. Ralph stated, "I'm not big on candy. I want to get them into the mode of, number one, being motivated to be successful to learn." Maude said,

> I don't do the candy thing because…I think that builds that expectation of almost like that conditioning of a pet. I guess I would like students ultimately to do what they are supposed to do because that's what is going to benefit them and that they begin to believe that it's going to benefit them and that's why they should do well...and I guess I would like to see students more intrinsically motivated than extrinsically motivated.

When prompted about using extrinsic motivators, Bart expressed the following position:

> I think it's (extrinsic motivator) artificial…that's not the way things are when they get out of school…there's no one going to be waving a piece of candy over your head. You're going to come in, do your work, and get

> your paycheck. Your reward is doing a good job...and...passing on to the next grade.

Abe explained that extrinsic motivators mask the reason for students to be in school. He said, "To me it's (extrinsic motivator) almost like giving them an allowance. There should be some understanding of the value of them being here (school)."

Some of the teachers did use rewards such as candy. They used candy to ensure total involvement of the class. Maggie said, "I do use candy from time to time if we are doing an activity mainly to ensure total participation...everyone will participate. You're gearing it toward those unmotivated kids who I think need that extrinsic motivation." Ned also expressed a need for using extrinsic motivators from time to time:

> I do challenge problems or review problems at the beginning of math class and the reward, the motivation, is a piece of candy...If I want the whole class's attention, I start waving the candy. Every kid is listening, they're all trying. I don't do that very often, but when I do it pulls them all back in and it does motivate them.

Lisa explained that extrinsic motivators are useful, but prudence should be exercise to avoid overuse:

> [Extrinsic rewards] just seem to get kids [involved] who would rather just sit back and let everybody else answer...I believe in them (extrinsic rewards like candy) if they're used in a good way. I don't believe in them to overuse...everyday. [If] it just ends up running your class, when it becomes too much...then it just becomes useless.

Ralph, a teacher who rarely uses extrinsic motivators, also described the dangers of overuse:

> If you have to do extrinsic motivation to get them to that point (intrinsically motivated), that's fine, but don't get them dependent on those extrinsic motivations. You don't want them to the point where, 'I'm not going to bring my report card envelop unless you give me a piece of candy.' If they become dependent on the reward to do the task, then you've blown it. You want them to do the task for intrinsic reasons. I just think there's dangers there.

The teachers who use extrinsic motivators, however, expressed internal motivation as the ultimate goal. Ned expressed the following desire:

> I think every teacher's ultimate goal is to get all children to be self-motivated. I mean I don't want to be waving the candy around in front of the kids in June. If I can motivate them, and get them to where they get a joy out of learning, and then they become successful, and then the reward is 'gosh, I like getting these As and Bs versus getting Cs and Ds and Fs,' they don't need the candy anymore. It's from within, that's my ultimate goal.

Ralph offered a similar position:

> Even if you are giving extrinsic rewards, you're ultimately moving them along a continuum that gets them to being more, A, independent learners and, B, more intrinsically motivated. That's the point; you want to get them to that point. You have to do what works.

Motivation is Internal

One teacher expressed a belief that teachers have little influence over student motivation. Abe explained that teachers can exert some influence, but motivation is "self-directed:"

> Motivation to me is almost self-direction by a student. It's not so much what a teacher does to motivate. I think motivation is something that is within each person. I've seen so often where you've got two brothers or brother and sister in the same family where one is going to be successful, get the homework done and the other will not. And they have the same environment at home, the same environment at school. Motivation is more…from within. Teachers can help in this direction, but most of it is from within the student.

Positive and Negative Parental Influences on Motivation

Most of the teachers interviewed described a connection between perceived parental support and the student's desire for success. Ned stated, "I would tend to say that kids, but not all kids, that come in motivated are from parents that are also good motivators." Marge agreed by saying, "For the most part, if the parent is motivated and

very much involved in the education of the child, the child usually does much better."

Homer said,

> Usually the parents that are very interested in their child's education, the parent that's involved, and the one that wants to know what's going on give me a call if something doesn't turn out right. Those are usually the parents of students who are motivated. There's always exceptions to the rule, but usually if a parent's involved, the child's engaged.

A lack of parental support can produce an unmotivated student. Troy explained,

> Lack of parental involvement…parents who never contact the school, who never come to the school, who never inquire, you have a real problem then with motivating students because they get absolutely no sense of importance of education at home…an unmotivated parent will most often produce an unmotivated student.

Some teachers warned that some parents exert too much pressure or stress on their child. In that situation, parental involvement becomes detrimental to the student. Marge said that children will resist these parents:

> I think you get almost 100% correlation [between parent and child motivated behavior], however, I have to kind of back up a little bit. That can be overdone and a too motivated parent, I've seen children just dig their heels in and it becomes a way for them, if they're not motivated, to put the screws to mom and dad if they're over motivated or really putting too much pressure on.

Ralph explained that students will "shut down" when presented with too much pressure:

> [When parents place too much pressure on their children], they can shut down…I've seen kids who are under a lot of pressure and they just can't deal with it…If there's too much pressure, it's because the parent does not know the child.

Lisa stated that some parents want their children to do well, but take over much of the work and decision-making that the children need to experience to become independent and responsible for their own learning:

> There seems to be a fine line between parents who want to help and actually doing for their kids. The kids who aren't motivated, sometimes the parents who want their kids to do well will do so much for them that they never learn to fly on their own. They never learn strategies to ask a question, or to get organized, or to write their homework down, or to complete their homework.

Troy described a similar position:

> Sometimes the more actively involved a parent is, the less it motivates a student. The parent is really too controlling, they fight too many battles. So you would like to say that the more interest that a parent has in a student, the more motivated the student will become, but that's not [always] so.... If a parent, A, puts too much pressure or, B, comes in and fights all the battles for the student, then I don't think that in either case you're going to get a motivated student.

Some teachers described positive parent and child relationships. Troy explained that a parent who is accepting of his or her child can motivate:

> I found that the biggest correlation is when a parent is willing to accept the student for what the student is and then tries to work within that to gain the goals that the parent feels that the student should strive for. We have a lot of students who are content say to make Bs and Cs when they could make As and Bs. If their parents are willing to recognize that As and Bs aren't as important to the student as they are to the parent, but the parents are still willing to work and encourage the student to set their aim a little higher, then I think you find students who will become more motivated to succeed.

Bart explained that a child will assume the behavior of a parent when he or she models motivated or unmotivated behavior:

> You can tell a lot after parent conference day.... They (students) seem to have parents who are motivated, not necessarily to make their child do well, but motivated parent in their own right. [Motivated parents are] people who are successful in their own jobs and it doesn't have to be necessarily a businessman or someone like that, but people who enjoy their jobs...and show their kids that it's fun to go to work.
>
> Sometimes the unmotivated students seem to have the same type of parents: not really motivated to follow through with the things they say they're going to do.

Ralph explained that a child's motivation to do well in school is often because parents emphasize education and accept their child for his or her effort:

> The influence of the adults in a child's life really have a very big impact in terms of setting the expectations. [It's good] if the expectations at the home are that not simply that you're going to bring home good grades, but that you're going to take you're schoolwork seriously and your education is important…and the value of your education is part of who you are.

Ralph also explained that parents must actually value education. Children will realize if parents are merely stating education is important, but do not believe it:

> If the message at home is 'just get through it,' 'it's not important,' the modeling at home is not there, most kids are going to have a hard time. Almost every parent is going to say, 'Yeah, we want you to do well on your report card,' but we also know that education is not important to a lot of people and even if you say it's important to your kid, if it's not important the kid knows that. The kid can read parents much better that we would like them to be able to [in that situation].
>
> I think [the] bottom line is that the expectations are there from the home, and again, we're not talking socioeconomic, because it goes across the board. It doesn't matter if the kid's country club or poor, if the expectation at home is 'your schooling is important for you (student)' and 'your schooling is important to me (parent), at least this is what I expect from you,' then those kids are going to have a lot more motivation. [If] it's not just for the letter grade, but for the effort that's being put into it and the values behind it, those kids are gradually going to move that much further along that line towards intrinsic. And at some point they're going to internalize those things and say, 'Yeah, this is important for me, it's important for me to be as successful as I can and therefore as motivated as I can.'

## Implications

This study identified motivation in terms of students attempting success by choosing to participate in tasks that yield success in school or facilitate learning. Research indicates conflicting findings on whether motivation is internal or external, however, at some point, each individual student makes his or her own decision to attempt a task.

All of the interviewed teachers explained that most or all students want to experience success. Therefore, teachers can elicit student motivation by identifying reasons for unmotivated behavior and implementing appropriate strategies.

Teachers need to understand and become sensitive to reasons that cause unmotivated behavior. Students may exhibit unmotivated behavior such as:

- incomplete assignments
- unprepared for class
- indifferent attitude
- minimal/superficial effort
- disinterest/sleeping during class
- resistance or disruptions
- unhappiness during class

These behaviors may be due to:

- emotional stress of rapid physical changes
- peer pressure
- insecurity
- lack of skills necessary for success

- difficulties connecting the material learned in school to life beyond the classroom
- academic performance below grade level
- fear or anxiety of specific content
- lack of parental support
- excessive stress caused by parents
- excessive parental involvement

Of all the teacher behaviors identified that elicit student motivation, establishing a positive student-teacher relationship was emphasized as the most important. A student is motivated when he/she knows that his/her teacher cares about him/her. Furthermore, the teacher must truly care about his/her student; a student will realize false concern. When a positive student-teacher relationship is established, a level of trust is established. In addition, the student understands the teacher's expectations.

A positive student-teacher relationship can be established when teachers take an interest in the student. The teacher can inquire about student interests or activities outside of the classroom. The teacher can attend extracurricular activities such as band/choral concerts or sporting events. During instruction, teachers can establish a positive student-teacher relationship by valuing each student's contribution to classroom discussion, even if it is a unique or alternative approach to thinking and problem solving.

Teachers must be prepared to provide a wide range of classroom activities and teaching styles that include all students. Interviewees emphasized the existence of a diverse student population. Some students respond to humor and others may not; some students may respond better to a learning and/or social environment with a serious tone. During class, hands-on activities may or may not be more motivating than direct

instruction. Some students respond best to group activities and other students respond best to activities that are individually based.

Many students in the same class are often working at different ability levels. Teachers of skills-based classes such as math and language arts emphasized this point. Student understanding and learning becomes attainable when teachers provide tasks and learning environments that match their students' ability levels.

Thoughtfully planned lessons motivate students. Students are involved in the learning process when lessons consist of engaging activities. The class material, assignments, and assessments must be meaningful; students are motivated when they see material as relevant to their lives (i.e., teachers should avoid assigning "busy work").

Adolescents are still in a process of growth. Students at this stage are often influenced by modeled behaviors. Teachers who model positive behaviors can motivate students. For example, students tend to express more interest in material that is presented enthusiastically. Furthermore, when a teacher present himself or herself as someone who enjoys his or her job, students realize that one can enjoy work.

The research and the interviewed subjects drew distinctions between intrinsically and extrinsically motivated students, but expressed divided views regarding whether or not extrinsically students can become intrinsically motivated. The predominant position, however, was that the goal of using extrinsic motivators is to work toward intrinsic motivation, but extrinsic motivators can become detrimental when overused. If extrinsic motivators are deemed necessary to elicit total involvement, the frequency of their use must be decreased over time.

A parent's involvement in his or her child's education can be positive or negative. A parent who places too much stress on a child can cause the child to resist assistance with his or her education. A parent who assumes too much of his or her child's academic responsibility will limit the child's opportunities to learn skills necessary for independence. A parent establishes a positive relationship with a child when he or she accepts the child for his or her ability and is prepared to support the child when necessary. Furthermore, when education is truly valued in the home, a student will often be motivated to do well.

## Summary and Conclusion

This study sought to identify methods for increasing student motivation by drawing from the insight and behaviors of experienced and highly effective teachers. It was determined that establishing a positive student-teacher relationship is a strong motivator. Furthermore, many classrooms contain students of diverse backgrounds, personalities, and abilities; teachers should be prepared to cater to a diverse class. In addition, students' interest is enhanced when connections are presented between their lives beyond the classroom and the material presented in school; it is often necessary for the teacher to make those connections. Finally, extrinsic motivators were advocated only as a means of getting total classroom involvement and should be used with decreasing frequency since eliciting intrinsic student motivation was stated as the goal of each teacher.

This study also drew distinctions between positive and negative parental involvement as observed by the interviewed subjects. Motivation is lowered when parents assume student academic responsibility and/or place excessive stress on the student. Student motivation is enhanced when parents create an accepting and supportive relationship with their children while placing value on their child's education.

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